

Intelligence Information Cable

ROUTINE

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COUNTRY LAOS/NORTH VIETNAM/SOUTH VIETNAM

DOI 1962 - MID-JULY 1970

SUBJECT

1. SIGHTINGS OF AMERICAN POW'S TRANSITING LAOS
2. NVA/PL REGULATIONS PRESCRIBING TREATMENT OF PRISONERS
3. PL PRISON AT XAM CHALO FOR LAO POLITICAL OFFENDERS

ACO (LAOS, VIENTIANE (11 OCT - 5 NOV 1971))

SOURCE

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SUMMARY. IN MID-JULY 1970 FOUR AMERICAN PRISONERS OF  
WAS (POW) AND A 30-MAN NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) ESCORT  
WERE OBSERVED AT A POINT BETWEEN MUONG PRIME AND TCHERONE  
ON THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN EASTERN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE.  
THE AMERICANS WERE REPORTED BY NVA SOLDIERS TO BE PILOTS  
CAPTURED IN SOUTH VIETNAM WHO WERE BEING TAKEN TO NORTH  
VIETNAM FOR INCARCERATION. THE POW'S WERE CAUCASIANS  
BETWEEN 30 AND 40 YEAR OLD AND, EXCEPT FOR SOME FATIGUE  
FROM THEIR MARCH, WERE IN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION. IN  
1962 - 1963 FOUR AMERICAN POW'S, REPORTED TO BE MILITARY  
ADVISORS WHO SURVIVED A 1962 PLANE CRASH IN THE VICINITY  
OF SAM NEUA, WERE DETAINED BY PATHET LAO (PL) FORCES AT  
SAM NEUA. DURING DETENTION, ONE OF THE POW'S REPORTEDLY  
WAS SHOT AND KILLED WHILE ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE. AFTER  
APPROXIMATELY SEVEN MONTHS IN SAM NEUA, THE THREE REMAINING  
PRISONERS WERE MOVED TO HANOI. THE PL AND NVA USUALLY TOOK  
PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO SAFEGUARD THE LIVES OF AMERICAN  
POW'S TRANSITING THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL BY PROVIDING COVER  
FROM AIRSTRIKES. ALTHOUGH PL AND NVA TREATMENT OF FRENCH

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POW'S WAS HARSH DURING EARLIER PHASES OF THE INDOCHINA WAR, CURRENT PL/NVA POLICY TOWARD AMERICAN AND THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL (TCN) POW'S HAS BEEN FAR LESS SEVERE, ESPECIALLY TOWARD AMERICAN PILOTS. NVA SOLDIERS APPEAR TO BE VERY CONSCIOUS OF WORLD OPINION ON POW'S. HOWEVER, THE PL AND NVA TREAT CAPTURED LAO AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLITICAL PRISONERS SEVERELY, IN PART BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSIDERED TRAITORS, NOT POW'S. MISTREATMENT OF AMERICAN AND TCN POW'S IS COUNTER TO PL AND NVA REGULATIONS, AND OFFENDERS ARE SUBJECT TO PUNISHMENT. PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF AMERICAN AND TCN POW'S IS OFTEN RESENTED BY PL OFFICERS. AMERICAN AND TCN POW'S ARE SENT TO NORTH VIETNAM BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY IN PROVIDING FOOD AND SECURITY IN LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM. THERE ARE NO KNOWN PRISONS FOR AMERICANS OR TCN POW'S IN SAM KHUA OR SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE. HOWEVER, THERE IS A PRISON FOR LAO POLITICAL OFFENDERS AT KAM CHALO NEAR TCHEPONE. LAO ARMED FORCES (FAR) SOLDIERS CAPTURED BY THE PL AND NVA ARE CONSIDERED TO BE POW'S AND RECEIVING MUCH BETTER TREATMENT THAN LAO POLITICAL PRISONERS. THE CAPTURED

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[REDACTED]

PAR SOLDIERS ARE INDOCTRINATED BY PL PROPAGANDISTS AND RELEASED TO JOIN THE PL OR RETURN TO THEIR HOMES IF THEY PLEDGE NEVER AGAIN TO JOIN PAR AND FIGHT THE PL. END SUMMARY.

1. IN MID-JULY 1970 FOUR AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR (POW) ESCORTED BY ABOUT 30 NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) TROOPS WERE OBSERVED RESTING AT A POINT BETWEEN MUONG PHINH (XD 0927) AND TCHEPONG (XD 3244) WHILE TRANSITING THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN EASTERN SAVANNAHIST PROVINCE. ONE NVA SOLDIER SAID THE POW'S WERE AMERICAN PILOTS CAPTURED IN SOUTH VIETNAM WHO WERE BEING MOVED TO NORTH VIETNAM FOR INCARCERATION. THE PRISONERS WERE CAUCASIANS WITH "BIG NOSES." THREE PRISONERS WORE PILOT'S UNIFORMS, AND ONE WORE NVA FATIGUES. ALL OF THE AMERICANS APPEARED TO BE BETWEEN 30 AND 40 YEARS OF AGE. [REDACTED] COMMENT. THE OFFICIAL'S ABILITY TO DETERMINE ACCURATELY THE APPROXIMATE AGE OF CAUCASIANS HAS NOT BEEN ESTABLISHED.)

2. THE POW'S APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION

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BUT SOMEWHAT FATIGUED FROM THE MARCH ALONG THE TRAIL. HOWEVER, THE POW'S MOVED READILY AND EASILY WHEN THE GROUP DEPARTED THE REST AREA. THE NVA ESCORT GROUP WAS NOT PARTICULARLY ALERT FOR A POSSIBLE ESCAPE ATTEMPT, SINCE THE POW'S WERE FATIGUED AND HAD NO MAPS OR DEVICES TO SIGNAL RESCUE AIRCRAFT. WHEN MOVING, A 30 TO 40 METER DISTANCE WAS MAINTAINED BETWEEN EACH POW. THE NVA SOLDIER COMMENTED THAT HE WAS GLAD NONE OF THE AMERICANS WAS WOUNDED; OTHERWISE, THE NVA WOULD BE REQUIRED TO CARRY HIM. WHILE IN THE REST AREA, THE AMERICANS ATE THE SAME FOOD AS THE NVA TROOPS, BUT JUDGING FROM THE TENOR OF THEIR COMMENTS AND THEIR EXPRESSIONS, THE AMERICANS OBVIOUSLY DID NOT ENJOY THE FOOD.

3. IN 1962 - 1963 THE PATHET LAO (PL) DETAINED FOUR AMERICANS IN THE VICINITY OF SAM NEUA IN A CONCRETE BUILDING FORMERLY OCCUPIED BY A ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST. THEY WERE MILITARY ADVISORS WHO SURVIVED AN AIR CRASH NEAR SAM NEUA, BUT WERE REPORTEDLY NOT AIRCRAFT PILOTS. [REDACTED] COMMENT.

[REDACTED] LISTINGS CARRY NO INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL OTHER THAN PILOTS OR CREWMEN INVOLVED IN CRASHES IN THE SAM NEUA AREA.) THE POW'S WORE GREEN FATIGUE UNIFORMS. THE PL

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PROVIDED THE AMERICANS WITH BEDS AND WITH FOOD PURCHASED FROM THE NVA, BECAUSE THE AMERICANS WOULD NOT EAT LAO FOOD. WHILE IN DETENTION AT SAM NAM, ONE PRISONER ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE AND WAS SHOT AND KILLED. AFTER APPROXIMATELY SEVEN MONTHS DETENTION AT SAM NAM, THE THREE REMAINING PRISONERS WERE TAKEN TO HANOI BY THE NVA, BECAUSE THE POW'S WERE CONTINUALLY SUFFERING FROM DIETARY PROBLEMS. [REDACTED] COMMENT. THE NEO LAO BAK SAT OFFICIAL WAS NOT VERY INTERESTED IN PRISONERS AT THE TIME AND TOOK ONLY CASUAL NOTE THAT THE POW'S WERE AMERICANS. THIS IS THE ONLY AMERICAN HE HAS HEARD OF BEING KILLED WHILE A PRISONER OF THE PL OR NVA IN LAOS.)

4. DURING THE APPROXIMATELY ONE MONTH TRANSIT TIME BETWEEN HUONG PHINK/TCHEPONK AND HANOI, THE NVA USUALLY TAKES PRECAUTIONS TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF AMERICAN PRISONERS BEING ESCORTED THROUGH THE AREA. JUST AS AIRSTRIKES TAKE A TOLL OF PL AND NVA WHO LIVE, WORK, AND TRAVEL ALONG THE TRAIL, THE AIRSTRIKES COULD POSSIBLY TAKE A TOLL OF AMERICAN POW'S BEING MOVED THROUGH THE AREA. OFTEN, HOWEVER, AIRSTRIKES ARE ANTICIPATED BY THE PL/NVA COMMAND AT NEO LAO BAK SAT (NLS).  
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HEADQUARTERS IN SAN YELLA, WHICH MAINTAINS NVA SECURITY AND MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL ALONG THE TRAIL TO CLEAR THE AREA OF ALL PERSONNEL, INCLUDING AMERICAN POW'S. SHELTER IS PROVIDED BY HEAVILY FORTIFIED BUNKERS ALONG THE SIDES OF THE TRAIL. AMERICAN PRISONERS ARE USUALLY TRANSPORTED ALONG THE TRAIL IN TRUCKS WHENEVER POSSIBLE. [REDACTED] COMMENT. IT IS SOMETIMES NOT ADVISABLE TO CARRY PRISONERS IN TRUCKS, SINCE TRUCKS ARE SUBJECT TO AIR ATTACKS.) THE ENTIRE TRIP FROM SOUTH VIETNAM TO HANOI TAKES APPROXIMATELY TWO MONTHS, DEPENDING UPON EFFECTIVENESS OF AIRSTRIKES, WEATHER CONDITIONS, AVAILABILITY OF NVA TRUCKS, AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF PRISONERS AND ESCORT TROOPS. [REDACTED] COMMENT. THE U.S. OFFICIAL HEARD OF SEVERAL AMERICAN POW'S WHO DIED FROM ILLNESSES WHILE TRANSITING THE TRAIL, BUT NO DETAILS WERE AVAILABLE.)

5. THE PL AND NVA, ESPECIALLY THE NVA, TREATED FRENCH POW'S HARSHLY DURING THE EARLIER PHASE OF THE INDOCHINA WAR, BUT POLICY TOWARD AMERICAN AND THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL (TCN) POW'S HAS BEEN FAR LESS SEVERE, PARTICULARLY TOWARD AMERICAN

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PILOTS. THE PL AND NVA ARE EXTREMELY CONSCIOUS OF WORLD OPINION REGARDING AMERICAN AND TCH POW'S. IN FACT, AMERICAN AND TCH POW'S ARE USUALLY TREATED FAR BETTER THAN CAPTURED LAO AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE, PARTLY BECAUSE AMERICANS AND TCH'S ARE CONSIDERED POW'S, WHILE LAO AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARE CONSIDERED TRAITORS TO THEIR COUNTRIES. THERE IS NO KNOWN OR ACCEPTED PL/NVA POLICY TO KILL OR MISTREAT AMERICAN OR TCH POW'S. IN FACT, THE OPPOSITE IS THE CASE. IF A PL OR NVA SOLDIER MISTREATS AMERICAN OR TCH POW'S, HE IS SUBJECT TO PUNISHMENT BY HIS PL OR NVA SUPERIORS. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, POOR QUALITY AND UNDISCIPLINED FIELD COMMANDERS AND SOLDIERS IN PL AND NVA UNITS WHO MAY MISTREAT POW'S. REGULATIONS ON THE HANDLING OF POW'S ARE REQUIRED STUDY MATERIAL FOR PL AND NVA SOLDIERS AND NLRS OFFICIALS, BUT AS IN ALL ARMIES SOME SOLDIERS BREAK THE REGULATIONS.

6. MANY PL AND NVA TROOPS RESENT THE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF AMERICAN AND TCH POW'S. FOR EXAMPLE, AMERICAN PRISONERS ARE ALLOCATED FOUR OR FIVE NORTH VIETNAMESE DONG IN HANOI OR ITS PL KIP EQUIVALENT IN

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SAN MEUA FOR SUBSISTENCE, A RATE EQUAL TO THE DAILY  
SUBSISTENCE PAID TO A PL OFFICER OR BATTALION COMMANDER  
RANK. [REDACTED] COMMENT. ONE U.S. DOLLAR EQUALS 2.5 DONG.)  
ALSO, THE HIGHER THE RANK OF THE POW, THE MORE PREFERENTIAL  
IS HIS TREATMENT. PL FORCES WHO TAKE AMERICANS OR TCV  
PRISONERS TURN THE POW'S OVER TO THE NVA, BECAUSE THE PL  
CANNOT SUPPORT THE POW'S ADEQUATELY. ONE REASON THE NVA —  
ATTEMPTS TO TRANSPORT AMERICAN PRISONERS CAPTURED IN LAOS  
AND SOUTH VIETNAM TO NORTH VIETNAM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE  
IS THAT ADEQUATE FOOD IS DIFFICULT TO ACQUIRE IN LAOS AND  
SOUTH VIETNAM AS A RESULT OF THE LOGISTICS INVOLVED IN  
OBTAINING LOCAL FOOD AND BRINGING FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES  
DOWN THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL. THEREFORE, WHENEVER POSSIBLE  
AMERICAN AND TCV POW'S ARE SENT TO HANOI, WHERE IT IS EASIER  
TO CARE FOR THEM AND PROVIDE SECURITY DURING THEIR INCARCER-  
RATION. [REDACTED] COMMENT. THE REASON ALL AMERICAN POW'S  
LOOK THIN AND MISTREATED IN NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPHS IS  
PROBABLY THE SAME REASON THEY LOOK THIN ON THE HO CHI MINH

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TRAIL IN LAOS, I.E., POOR MORALE CAUSED BY THEIR CAPTURE. POOR MORALE RESULTS IN POW'S OFTEN REFUSING TO EAT OR NOT BEING ABLE TO EAT LOCALLY OBTAINABLE FOOD AND HAVING DIFFICULTY SLEEPING UNDER HARSH CONDITIONS IN THE JUNGLE AREAS OF LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM. ALSO, BEING IN THE TRAIL AREA AND BEING IN A WEAKENED PHYSICAL STATE, THE AMERICAN POW'S ARE PROBABLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO MALARIA, DYSENTERY, AND OTHER DISEASES FROM WHICH THE PL AND NVA TROOPS REGULARLY SUFFER.)

7. THERE ARE NO PRISONS IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE OR SAM NEUA DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR INCARCERATION OF AMERICAN OR TCH POW'S. HOWEVER, THERE IS A PRISON AT BAN CHALO (ED 1446) APPROXIMATELY 23 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF TCHIPOUE USED FOR INCARCERATION OF LAO ACCUSED OF POLITICAL CRIMES AGAINST THE PL AND THE NLHS. THESE SUSPECTS ARE TREATED RATHER HARSHLY, BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSIDERED TO BE TRAITORS TO THEIR COUNTRY RATHER THAN POW'S. THERE IS NO KNOWN POW OR POLITICAL CRIMES PRISON IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF MUONG PHINE, BUT IN 1964 A ROYAL LAO AIR FORCE T-28 PILOT NAMED BOOUNKONG, A NATIVE OF SAVANNAKHET TOWN, WAS SHOT DOWN IN THE VICINITY OF

MUONG PHINE. WHILE DETAINED THERE, BOUKHONG WAS SUBJECTTED TO AN INTENSIVE INDOCTRINATION BY NLHS OFFICIALS. BOUKHONG SUBSEQUENTLY ACCEPTED A MINOR NLHS OFFICIAL POSITION IN THE VICINITY OF MUONG PHINE, A JOB HE REPORTEDLY STILL HOLDS.

8. THE PL/NLHS POLICY TOWARD LAO ARMED FORCES (FAR) POW'S DIFFERS FROM THAT TOWARD LAO POLITICAL PRISONERS, BUT FAR POW'S ARE ESSENTIALLY TREATED WELL AND ARE FEED AND PROVIDED FOR ON A SCALE COMPARABLE TO THEIR EQUIVALENT PL RANKS. WHEN FAR SOLDIERS ARE TAKEN PRISONER, THEY ARE BOUND SECURELY AND MOVED TO PL-CONTROLLED AREAS. IF THE FAR POW'S DID NOT EXHIBIT HOSTILITY OR AN INTENT TO ESCAPE, THEY ARE UNTIED BUT ARE WATCHED CLOSELY BY SECURITY PERSONNEL. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE FAR POW'S UNDERGO INDOCTRINATION TRAINING GIVEN BY NLHS PROPAGANDA PERSONNEL. THE INDOCTRINATION STRESSES SUCH THEMES AS LAO BROTHERHOOD, THE UNIFICATION OF LAOS, AND PEACE IN LAOS. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE INDOCTRINATION, THE FAR POW'S ARE ASKED IF THEY WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE PL/NLHS OR RETURN HOME TO THEIR VILLAGES. IF THEY OPT TO RETURN HOME, THEY MUST PLEDGE NEVER AGAIN TO SERVE FAR AGAINST THE PL/NLHS. MANY OF THE FAR POW'S CAPTURED AT NAV BAK IN NORTHERN LAOS IN 1968 DECIDED TO STAY

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IN THE SAN MIGUEL AREA AS LABORERS FOR THE PL/VNLB RATHER THAN RETURN TO FAR AND BE PLACED IN COMBAT AGAIN. ALSO IN 1968, A NUMBER OF FAR POW'S CAPTURED AT HOIAY SAN (ID 8436), APPROXIMATELY 30 KILOMETERS EAST OF TCHIEPGKIN IN MILITARY REGION III, UNDERWENT NLB INDOCTRINATION IN THE XA TEALAN (ID 1326) AREA. THEY WERE SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED TO RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES UPON PLUGGING NOT TO REJOIN FAR UNITS.

9. FIELD DISSEM. STATE ARMY AIR USAID (DIRECTOR ONLY)  
USIS (DIRECTOR ONLY) CINCPAC PACFLT PACAF AFPAF MACV/JPAC  
7TH AF 7/13TH AF TIA/REP [REDACTED]

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